

Professor Facebook /More connective tissue may make academia more efficient

GIVEN journalists' **penchant** for sticking the suffix "gate" onto anything they think smells of conspiracy, a public-relations consultant might have suggested a different name. But ResearchGate, a small firm based in Berlin, **is immune to** such **trivia**. It is ambitious, too—aiming to do for the academic world what Mark Zuckerberg did for the world in general, by creating a social network for scientists. And it is successful. About 1.4m researchers have **signed up** already, and that number is growing by 50,000 a month.

Non-scientists might be surprised that such a network is needed. After all, the internet was originally created mainly by academics for academics and Mr Zuckerberg's invention, Facebook, got its start on college campuses. But though the internet has **speeded things up**, it has not fundamentally changed how researchers are connected. Academic communities are still pretty fragmented, **frequently** making it hard for scientists to find others doing similar research. And results often are not shared across disciplines.

To make things more efficient and **interdisciplinary**, ResearchGate wants to help the academic world to grow more connective **tissue**, as Ijad Madisch, one of the firm's founders, **puts it**. As on Facebook, users create a profile page with biographical information, list their interests and research skills, and join groups. They can see what others with **similar** interests are up to and post comments. They can also upload their papers and create invitation-only workgroups.

The big question is whether ResearchGate will make enough money to keep its investors happy. So far, it is **running** on cash from Accel Partners and Benchmark Capital, two **venture capitalists** based in Silicon Valley. A third firm is expected to join them soon. But these people will want a return on their investment.

Some of that may already have come from the Max Planck Society, which **runs** many of Germany's best **research campuses** and had ResearchGate build it a private network. **Over the longer haul**, the firm hopes to charge companies and universities for using it to advertise jobs, and to operate a marketplace for laboratory materials. It has no plans to post other advertising, though, nor to charge its users directly.

At the moment, most of those users are in their 20s. Their favourite activity is to ask each other questions about practical research problems, from **DNA-sequencing techniques** to statistical tricks. They are also busy reading each other's papers: more than 10m have been uploaded. (Most scientific journals now allow authors to post their work on "personal web pages", which includes profile pages on social networks, according to Dr Madisch.)

The service certainly saves these young researchers **trial and error**, and therefore time and money. They will probably also like a new feature ResearchGate is planning to introduce in April: a feedback system which lets users rate each other's **contributions**. This would allow them **to build a reputation** other than by publishing papers.

Scientists whose reputations are established may be more **hesitant**, though, and not just because they are set in their ways. Science is not only about **collaboration** but also about competition. This limits what people are willing to share. But Dr Madisch is optimistic. Those who have grown up with Facebook, he says, know that sharing will improve their research. And their older colleagues will **eventually** come around—or retire.

Vocabulary tasks.

- 1) **penchant** - a feeling of liking something very much or a tendency to do something a lot;
- 2) **trivia** - unimportant details or information;
- 3) **tissue** - the substance that animal and plant cells are made of;
- 4) **haul** - the number of points, wins, or successes that someone gets;

Give the English equivalents of the following phrases.

- 1) научные круги / профессура; 2) быть невосприимчивым к чему-либо; 3) подписаться; 4) подстегивать / ускорять; 5) дезинтегрировать; 6) междисциплинарный; 7) предприниматель, идущий на риск; 8) метод проб и ошибок; 9) вклад; 10) приобретать репутацию; 11) метод; 12) совместная работа; 13) сомневающийся; 14) в конце концов; 15) изменять мнение